

RELIGION

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information from Col and his people. According to Banholzer (quoted by Hofmayer)<sup>1</sup> the praying mantis is regarded as the messenger of Nyakang, so it seems likely that our undetermined insect was a larval mantis.

We may here refer to the special regard paid to trees growing near the shrines of dead kings, which we consider yet another aspect of the cult of Nyakang. This esteem is not remarkable, for the Shilluk country is in the main bare, with few shady trees, so that any tree growing in or on the outskirts of a village is preserved and the ground becomes to some extent a meeting and squatting place. But the Shilluk attitude appears to be something more than an appreciation of their grateful shade, though we could discover no regular cult. When a tree has grown, or is believed to have grown, near a shrine shortly after its erection, i.e. within a few months or years of the burial of a "divine king", it is thought that the tree has sprung from one of the logs used in making the grave, and in such cases the relation between the tree and the dead king is one that would easily suggest itself.<sup>2</sup>

Possession by the spirits of Nyakang and other Shilluk kings, i.e. conditions of dissociation attributed to these, will be considered when discussing medicine-men, especially the good medicine-man (*giaga*).

The Shilluk attitude towards the crocodile is naturally influenced by the belief in the aquatic attributes of the ancestors of Nyakang, and especially of his mother. The crocodile is generally spared, as some of the worst man-eaters are believed to be men whom other crocodiles have taken, and very dark coloured crocodiles are said to be either man-crocodiles or their descendants. Moreover Nikaiya lives in the river, and is definitely associated with the crocodile, and, though she may assume human form and at times come to the village by night in all friendliness, she may seize a man or a woman and bear him or her off to her home in the river and there change her

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p.

<sup>2</sup> As an instance we may cite an old tree at Kadiak whose stump was standing in 1901 near the grave of Nyakang, the twelfth king. If anyone had burned the wood of this tree, even accidentally, he would have died, and when the tree fell its fragments were collected and carried to the river, just as are the bones of certain mortals. There was in 1901 no shrine over the grave of Nyakang, probably because it is distant some little distance from the present native village and is surrounded by Government offices and houses, but it had a large crowd of, and a young man then had appeared at some distance from the stump of the old tree was regarded with respect. The old tree did not really spring from the grave of Nyakang, since it was abundant then during his lifetime, it stood near his house and thus he would often do justice to it; nevertheless, there is a general feeling that it is associated with his grave, and this feeling is so strong that many Shilluk at one time or another spoke of Nyakang being buried under the tree, though his grave was in reality a hundred yards away.

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## Occupations

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circumference of the finished wall. About two feet inside the trench are set forked stakes about two feet high and four feet apart. The rafters poles are now placed with heavy end in trench and resting in the forks of these poles, their tops are brought together and securely tied. The heavy grass bands are now fastened both above and under the poles at regular distances from bottom to top of roof. Corn stalks or cane are woven in between the bands and poles thickly. The roof now has its final conical shape. The roof is ready to be raised and is picked up and placed evenly upon the wall. A layer of mud is then put over the lower end of the rafters poles, to keep it steady in place. The first work in thatching is to put on what the Shilluk call the apron of the house. A short layer of grass is put around the top of the wall and tied securely to the thatching. The thatcher then starts his course straight up the roof and works around the house, finishing the entire length of the roof as he goes around. The grass is tossed up to him in small bundles, which he places in position several at a time and removes the bands and ties them down tightly. With a paddle-shaped stick he evens up the ends of the grass, so that when the roof is finished nothing but the best ends of the grass are exposed, and these lie so evenly as though they had been laid separately by hand. At the top the grass is brought together like a spike and wrapped with rope and rope bands. The grass lies on the roof from six inches to a foot thick, and if kept free from white ants, will last for five or six years.

## 2. Different kinds of Soil.

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134) black, rich earth

127) sandy ground

127) red earth as found on river-banks, used for making pots

127) brownish earth as found on river-banks, used for making pots

127) red mud

127) mud, dust.

## 3. Field-produce.

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127) date

127) banana

127) bean

127) cotton

127) a small, sweet ground, in season.

127) as vegetable ground

127) a ground for cultivation, not suitable

127) water

127) tobacco

127) water.

## 4. Different kinds of durra.

The common name: 127. The common name for white durra: 127.



made on all times of stress and misfortune. Everything round a shrine is sacred, especially trees - they are particularly rare in Shillukland in any case.

Certain Shilluk kings, particular incarnations of Nyikang, tend to be identified with particular species of animals. If such an animal approaches the shrine without signs of fear, it is assumed to be the form in which Nyikang appears, and a sacrifice is offered at the shrine. Almost any unusual behaviour on the part of an animal would lead the Shilluk to look on it as a temporary incarnation of Nyikang. Nyikang's mother, Nibwa, is reputed to have been a crocodile and is believed to live in the river in that form. A sacrifice is made to her by throwing a live sheep into the river. The crocodile is generally spared even though these creatures are a danger in river crossings.

There is a limited cult of the Ninka spirit Dengeit, and also a belief in the spirits of the bush and river.

#### THE CULT OF THE ANCESTORS

Beliefs concerning the ancestral spirits are vague. Reference is made to pen juk, 'the country of the dead', which is reached by the spirit after long wandering through the bush, but it is also believed that the spirit persists in or around the grave. Offerings and sacrifices are made to the ancestral spirits by the head of a household or local lineage on behalf of the descendants. If there is sickness or misfortune or the possibility of danger, a person will pray to his ancestors and make an animal sacrifice to propitiate them.

The ancestral cult seems, however, to be overshadowed by the national cult of Nyikang and the royal ancestors.

#### TOTEMIC BELIEFS

Seligman suggests that Shilluk totemism may have been derived from the Ninka because it seems so slight and unimportant. According to Seligman and Westermann the clans appear to have totems and some clans derive themselves from an animal or fish which Nyikang took and turned into people in order to repopulate the country. Seligman states that totem animals are often killed but it is considered wrong to eat them. (1) Most totems are animals but a few are plants. Children inherit their totems from their fathers; a woman keeps hers even when she is married. (2)

#### MAGICAL PRACTICES

##### The Witchdoctor (Ajango)

Ajango means 'man of Juk'. Such people are regarded as possessing certain magical powers which they use for the good of the community. People go to them when they are in need of help and pay them for their assistance. The powers of the ajango are believed to be due to their

(1) Seligman, *Die Shilluk*, 1923, p. 235.

(2) *Ibid.*

of his throne, the spirit of the divine Nyikang, which had been as it were in suspension since the last reth Anzi Kur had passed over a year ago, had entered into Dak Fadlet, and once again the Shilluk people could resume their normal life. 643

## NOTES.

1. *The body of Nyikang.*

It was explained in our previous article that the body of Nyikang consisted of a bundle of bamboos brought from the Nuba Mountains. I now believe that this is not the case and that only Dak's body is of bamboo. It is more likely that the bundle is of ambatch, indeed this is generally believed. The Shilluk believe that the soul of a mortal can pass into a stick of ambatch, and I am informed by Dr. J. A. Heasty that if a Shilluk dies away from his home his relatives hold a ceremony to make his soul pass into a stick of ambatch, which they take back to his village and bury there. 644

2. *The vigil of the Beads' Ours,' which are tied on to the reth's ankle.* 301

I interviewed the old *eyireth* who is responsible for these beads. She was reluctant to tell me much, and refused to show me the beads. I asked her, for she had great experience of these matters, how it came that some beads appeared with holes in them, and she told me that as she sat over them at night the ones which appear with holes went 'pop.' She told me that four had appeared with holes for reth Fadlet in 1918, and one for reth Anzi and five for reth Dak. She said four or five were about right, one was too few, and more than five was too many. The beads with holes are tied on to the reth's ankle only during the ceremonies, and after that they apparently close up. 645

3. *Nyakwer.*

It was not clear in 1944 what became of Nyakwer. It now appeared that she became *dashik*, i.e. will become a wife of the reth when she grows up. The girl who was Nyakwer in 1944 still lives in Fashoda, and is now about 13 years old. There was of course a different girl in 1948. 646

4. *Fashoda.*

The sacred village of Fashoda was most beautifully cleaned and repaired for the installation. All the houses had had their fences renewed, and courtyards replastered with mud, though some of them were rebuilt. The whole of the mound on which the royal shrine of 647

*Shilluk Life*

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Immediately every dog in the district is awake and alert and the peace of the night is shattered by a cacophony of furious barking. In the mission we thump our wet pillows and call down blessings on the dogs and the hyena. Eventually quiet is restored as the hyena's howls die away in the distance. The village sleeps. 512

Such then, in brief, is a description of Shilluk village life, yet our understanding of these people would be very incomplete without a more detailed picture of their activities, their work and their play. To them, as to most of the inhabitants of the continent of Africa, the common saying, "to work like a black", is scarcely applicable, for the Shilluk is no slacker of work than the next man, and he is not one of those restless individuals who are never happy unless busy with hand and brain making and mending and improving. Yet there are times when he must bestir himself, for he is essentially self-supporting. From soil and river he must provide himself with what he requires for food and shelter, and beyond this bare minimum of subsistence he must strive to get something more which he can sell or exchange for a cloth for himself and his wife, for a handful of salt and a drop of oil. If his labours yield no such margin, he may have to offer his services to the mission or the trader to earn the money to procure what he cannot provide himself. The Shilluk is, and indeed has to be, a man of all trades. To get the grain for his food he must farm the land, and although his methods of husbandry may be primitive, he is expert in the traditional way of farming. In fishing he is skilled in the use of the net, harpoon, spear and fish trap, and gets the best results possible from these methods. His house is neat and strongly built, and, according to one missionary of wide experience, is among the best thatched of all African houses. To cross the Nile on his fishing expeditions he must have a boat of some kind, and from a light, cork-like wood called ambach which grows plentifully in the Derwet area he constructs a beautiful, uninkable canoe, light enough to be carried by one man, yet able to carry three people in perfect safety. To roof his house and make fences around it he uses the

[464]  
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463 stalks of millet, binding them together with ropes which he  
 324 makes of grass. The same grass provides him with the  
 [289] thatch for the roof, mats for his door, ropes of varying  
 strength to tether his goats and cattle, and a rope of great  
 thickness and strength to assist him in the dangerous sport  
 of hunting the hippopotamus. From reeds gathered by the  
 riverside he weaves grain baskets and fish traps. If a cow of  
 463 his falls sick he can act as a veterinary doctor, and if he fails  
 [232] to effect a cure for the animal, he is quite competent at least  
 [323] to cure its hide! He makes his own pottery, beautifully  
 [415] symmetrical and balanced, without the aid of a wheel, and  
 [284] fires it in an earth oven, and grows the calabashes which  
 [237] provide him with drinking bowls. He can turn his hand to  
 shoemaking, fashioning a clumsy but serviceable sandal from  
 hippopotamus hide and cow skin by using his spear blade  
 very cleverly as both knife and awl. When his work is done  
 he will fill his home-made pipe with tobacco he has grown  
 and cured himself and gratefully drink the beer that his able  
 wife has brewed for him. There are, naturally, some among  
 them who are more gifted than others, or who show a special  
 aptitude in some particular craft and therefore specialise in  
 it. Thus, a Shilluk householder who wishes to have a superior  
 type of thatching on his house will call in an expert to do it;  
 yet such experts are comparatively few, because they are  
 unnecessary in a community where each one is brought up  
 to do everything for himself, and has no other work to  
 prevent him from living a communal tribal life in full. The  
 one craft that is completely exercised by a special few is that  
 [320] of the blacksmith, and this because ironwork is so small a  
 [411] need in the life of the Shilluk. It is true that his two spears  
 [412] and the small hoe he uses for cultivation are indispensable  
 to him, but once he acquires them they last a lifetime,  
 and it would be a waste for him to collect the—to him—  
 elaborate and expensive tools of the blacksmith's trade for  
 which he would seldom, or never, have use. If ever he  
 [437] needs a new spear or hoe he will, by buying or bartering,  
 [439] obtain it from the local smith, or—as is more likely in  
 these modern days—make his way to the nearest Arab